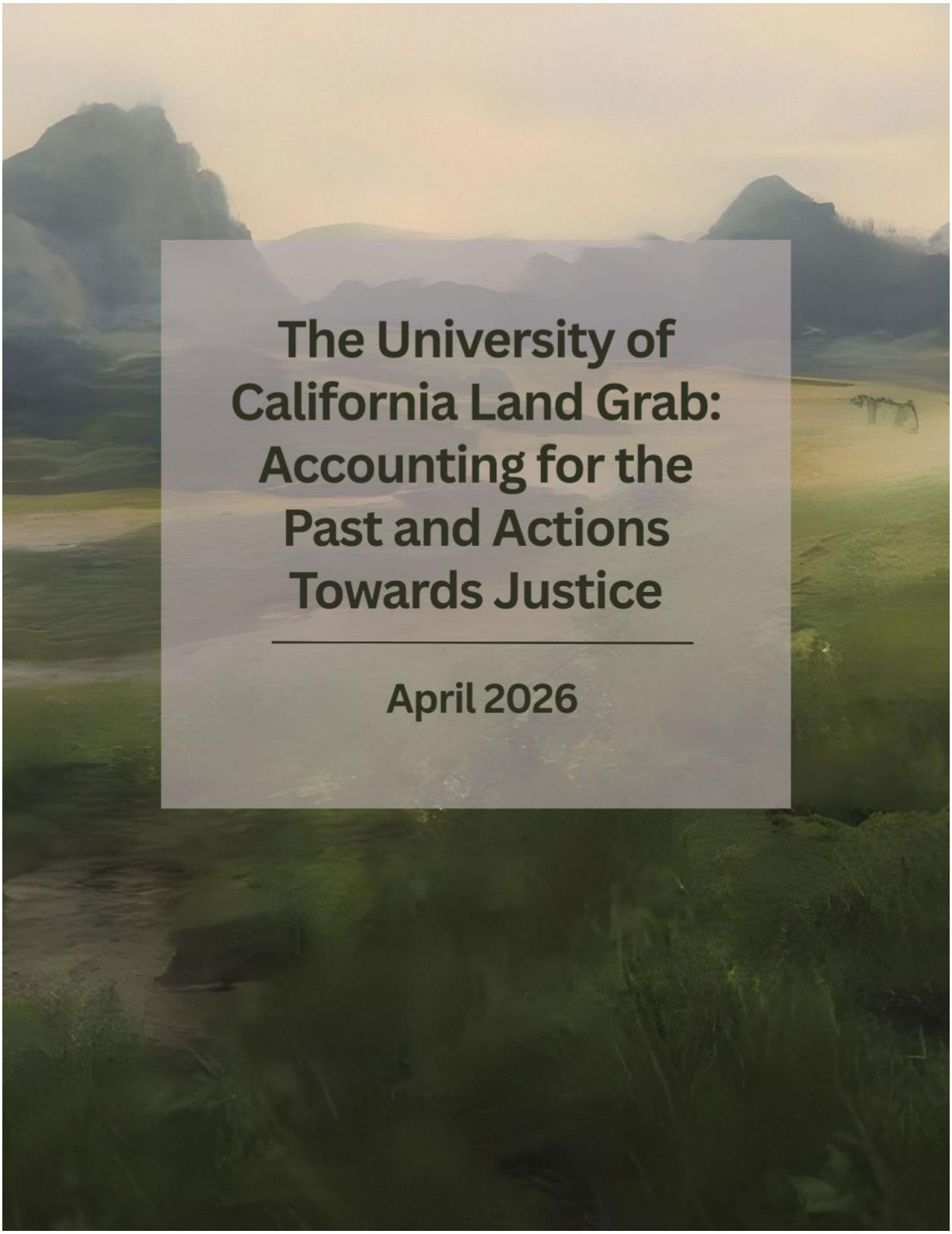

The University of California Land Grab: Accounting for the Past and Actions Towards Justice

April 2026

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Introduction and Overview

The University of California system was built on land and wealth extracted from Indigenous peoples. While this fact is increasingly acknowledged through land acknowledgments and academic research, meaningful institutional accountability and systemic change remain limited. This report documents presentations and discussions from The University of California Land Grab: Accounting for the Past and Actions Towards Justice, a symposium held at UC Davis on March 7, 2025, that brought together Tribal leaders, faculty, students, staff, and community members to advance conversations about the UC system's responsibilities as a land-grant institution.

About This Report

This report synthesizes the presentations, breakout discussions, and survey responses from the March 2025 symposium. The forum was planned by faculty and staff from UC Davis and UC Berkeley and aimed to build on momentum from a 2020 land-grab convening (organized by UC Berkeley and others) and subsequent scholarship examining how land-grant universities were funded through the dispossession of Native lands.

Since *High Country News* published the groundbreaking "Land Grab Universities" series by Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone in 2020, conversations about the responsibilities of land-grant institutions to Native American peoples have intensified nationally. However, responses within the UC system have been inconsistent and insufficient. This symposium sought to move beyond acknowledgment toward concrete action by:

- Revisiting and expanding conversations started in 2020
- Bringing new issues and perspectives to the forefront
- Identifying specific next steps for addressing UC's institutional accountability
- Centering the voices and priorities of Native communities, particularly California Indians

While this report does not comprehensively detail the history of land-grant institutions or the UC system's founding, readers seeking historical context are directed to The UC Land Grab: A Legacy of Profit from Indigenous Land report and the resources listed at the end of this document.

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Convening Partners and Co-sponsors

Grand Challenges: Reimagining the Land-Grant University
University of California, Davis
The initiative aims to help UC Davis acknowledge and address its history as a land-grant institution, which was funded by seizing and selling land from Native American Tribes. It focuses on advancing equity, strengthening relationships with Native American groups, and ensuring the university's mission serves the public good. grandchallenges.ucdavis.edu/

Native American Thriving Initiatives
University of California, Berkeley
Native American Thriving Initiatives at UC Berkeley is part of a broader set of Thriving Initiatives on the UC Berkeley campus. NATI exists to foster institutional change that supports Native people and makes visible issues impacting Native American people and communities. nati.berkeley.edu

Joseph A. Myers Center for Research on Native American Issues
University of California, Berkeley
The Joseph A. Myers Center is housed at UC Berkeley's Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (ISSI). The Center was founded in 2010 with a mission to provide the people of Indian country with pragmatic research products that can be employed to improve the quality of life for Native Americans throughout the US. The Center fulfills this mission by bringing the resources of the University to Native communities; developing, coordinating and funding collaborative, community-driven research projects; providing technical assistance and training; disseminating research publications and reports; and hosting conferences, colloquia and other events open to the public on topics of concern to Native communities. crnai.berkeley.edu

The symposium was co-sponsored by Tribal Health PRIME, UC Davis School of Medicine; Rausser College of Natural Resources, UC Berkeley; Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, University of California Office of the President.

Summary and Recommendations

This section synthesizes the major themes, findings, and recommendations that emerged from symposium presentations, breakout discussions, and participant feedback. The recommendations reflect both immediate actionable steps and longer-term structural changes necessary for the University of California (UC) to fulfill its responsibilities to Native communities as a land-grant institution. UC should invest resources to make change and should foster regional discussions to decide on the specific actions to take.

Major Themes

The Ongoing Nature of Colonial Dispossession

A central theme throughout the symposium was that colonial history is not past—it is ongoing. Speakers documented how the UC system and other land-grant universities continue to benefit from Indigenous land dispossession through multiple mechanisms:

- The original Morrill Act land grants (1862) that funded UC and 51 other institutions through the sale of approximately 11 million acres of Native land
- State trust lands that continue generating billions in revenue for public universities through extractive industries on Indigenous territories
- State trust lands located *within* current reservation boundaries that generate revenue for state institutions, while Tribes receive minimal or no compensation

The evidence presented demonstrated that this is not merely historical injustice requiring acknowledgment, but active, ongoing extraction requiring immediate institutional response.

From Consultation to Shared Authority

Across all sessions, participants emphasized that consultation with Tribes is insufficient. True accountability requires shared decision-making authority, particularly in areas including:

- Research governance and data sovereignty
- Land stewardship and access
- Curriculum development
- Student support programming
- Resource allocation

Several speakers noted that Tribes are sovereign nations, not stakeholder groups, and must be engaged accordingly. The power imbalance inherent in current "partnership" models often reproduces colonial dynamics even when intentions are good.

California's Unique Context and Responsibility

California's history presents distinct challenges and responsibilities:

- Approximately 25% of all Morrill Act land grants originated in California, funding universities across the nation.
- These land seizures occurred during the period of California Indian genocide following statehood in 1850.
- California's first state legislation legalized Indian slavery under the guise of "protection."
- Many California Tribes remain unrecognized by the federal government due to historical termination policies, creating ongoing barriers to services and resources.
- The UC system occupies multiple ancestral homelands and continues to manage significant land holdings.

This context demands California-specific solutions that address both historical and ongoing harms.

The Inadequacy of Current Responses

Participants consistently noted the gap between symbolic gestures and meaningful change:

- Land acknowledgments without action are insufficient.
- Diversity statements and equity initiatives often fail to address structural power imbalances.
- Native American Studies programs remain under-resourced and marginalized.
- Native students, faculty, and staff experience significant burden and burnout from service expectations.
- Research continues to extract knowledge from Native communities without appropriate reciprocity or Tribal control.

Key Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from presentations, discussions, and survey responses. They are organized thematically rather than priority, as different actions may be appropriate for different UC campuses and contexts. Examples of specific actions are offered; however, the presentations and discussions did not result in an action plan or consensus regarding actionable next steps. The actions are provided as possible actions and next steps. UC campuses should consult and collaborate with Native American Tribes and other community and campus stakeholders to determine priorities and appropriate next steps.

Student Support and Access

Tuition Equity for All California Indians

The UC Native American Opportunity Plan (implemented in 2022) provides free tuition to California residents who are enrolled in federally-recognized Tribes. While this policy is an important step in the right direction, the UC should provide tuition-free education to all California Indian students, regardless of federal recognition status. As Regent and Chairman Greg Sarris noted, his Tribe (Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria) has committed $2.5 million in perpetuity to provide scholarships for students from non-federally recognized Tribes—funding that should be the university's responsibility given its history.

Specific actions:

- Eliminate tuition for all California Indian students
- Extend this benefit to housing and parking costs
- Create support for students who need to pause their education for family or community responsibilities
- Ensure benefits extend to graduate and professional programs

Holistic Student Support Infrastructure

Native student success requires more than financial aid. Recommendations include:

- Increase Native representation in faculty and staff positions across all departments
- Create dedicated Native student spaces and cultural centers on every campus
- Provide culturally appropriate mental health and wellness services
- Recognize Tribal traditions in academic calendars
- Reduce service burden on Native students by adequately staffing Native programs
- Develop place-based mentorship programs connecting students with their communities

Family and Community-Centered Recruitment

To meaningfully recruit and retain Native students, the UC must shift from individual-focused models to family and community-centered approaches that recognize:

- Success for Native students involves entire families and communities
- Educational pathways must be relevant to community needs and values
- Long-term relationships with Tribal communities are essential
- Students need to see themselves valued in the educational system

Research Ethics and Data Sovereignty

Mandatory Tribal IRB Requirements[1]

Currently, no UC campus requires researchers to obtain Tribal Institutional Review Board approval before receiving UC IRB approval for research involving Native communities. This must change immediately.

Specific actions:

- Require Tribal IRB approval (where applicable) for all research involving Tribal communities, data, lands, or cultural resources
- Provide training and resources to help researchers navigate Tribal IRB processes
- Build sufficient time into research timelines for meaningful Tribal consultation and approval
- Recognize that research should not proceed if Tribes do not approve

Data Sovereignty and Ownership

UC's current data access policy presumes university ownership of all data, which conflicts with principles of Indigenous data sovereignty—the right of Indigenous peoples and nations to govern collection, ownership, and application of their own data.

Specific actions:

- Revise university data policies to recognize Tribal data sovereignty
- Develop template agreements that allow Tribes to maintain ownership and control of data
- Train researchers on alternatives to standard data-sharing requirements
- Work with funders to secure approval for data access agreements that respect Tribal sovereignty
- Create mechanisms for Tribes to request the return of data collected in past research

Equitable Compensation and True Partnership

Research partnerships must move beyond extractive models where universities benefit at Tribal expense.

Specific actions:

- Compensate Tribes and Native individuals at every stage: proposal development, data collection, analysis, storage, and dissemination
- Simplify bureaucratic barriers to timely compensation (e.g., gift card processes)
- Co-create research questions and methodologies with Tribal partners
- Ensure Tribal communities benefit from research outcomes

[1] UC NAGPRA Policy requires explicit written permission from affiliated Tribes for research on Native American human remains and potential cultural items, however, there is no similar process for other types of research impacting Tribes.

- Build researcher capacity for true partnerships beyond "checking consultation boxes"

Historical Data Inventory and Return

UC researchers have collected extensive data from Tribes over decades. Much of this data is not accessible to Tribal communities, or its location is unknown.

Specific actions:

- Conduct a systematic inventory of historical data collected from Tribal communities
- Contact Tribes to inform them of data holdings and offer access
- Honor Tribal requests for data return or restrictions on external access
- Begin with pilot projects at individual campuses or departments before scaling systemwide

Land Stewardship and Return

From Co-Stewardship Toward Land Back

While co-stewardship agreements represent progress, participants emphasized that these should be understood as intermediate steps toward the ultimate goal of land return to Native American peoples when Tribes request that.

Specific actions:

- Prioritize Land Back initiatives through policy and partnerships
- Recognize and validate Tribal sovereignty in all land-related decisions
- Establish co-management agreements with Tribal nations for campus lands and conservation areas with genuine shared authority
- Ensure co-stewardship success is defined by Tribal priorities, not university metrics
- Create legally binding agreements (cultural easements, repatriation protocols) rather than temporary "goodwill" arrangements

Cultural Access and Practice

Even before land return, the UC can immediately improve Tribal access to lands for cultural practices.

Specific actions:

- Facilitate Tribal access for gathering, ceremony, and cultural burning
- Remove bureaucratic barriers to Tribal land use
- Support restoration of culturally significant plants and ecosystems
- Integrate Indigenous fire management and ecological practices
- Co-develop school and youth programs with Tribal communities

Transparent Land Holdings Information

The UC Tribal Lands Workgroup has begun creating a GIS inventory of UC lands overlaid with Tribal homelands. This work must continue and be made publicly accessible.

Specific actions:

- Complete and publish a comprehensive mapping of UC land holdings and associated Tribal homelands
- Inventory all existing MOUs and agreements with Tribes
- Make this information easily accessible to Tribal governments
- Regularly update as new information emerges

Curriculum and Academic Programs

Native American Studies

Native American Studies should be a core ***requirement***, which would move it from the margins to the center of UC education.

Specific actions:

- Require Native American Studies courses for all undergraduate students across all majors
- Develop Homeland History courses specific to each campus location for undergraduate and graduate students
- Integrate Indigenous knowledge and methodologies across disciplines, particularly in environmental sciences, agriculture, and natural resources
- Support interdisciplinary collaboration that centers Native American research paradigms

New Degree Programs and Concentrations

Following the Cal Poly Humboldt model, UC campuses should develop degree programs that center on Indigenous knowledge.

Specific actions:

- Create degree programs in Indigenous Science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Develop concentrations in Tribal Forestry, Community Practice, and related fields
- Ensure these programs are developed in partnership with Tribal communities
- Provide adequate resources and faculty lines to sustain these programs

Place-Based and Community-Engaged Learning

Education must reconnect to land, culture, and Native American knowledge systems.

Specific actions:

- Support student-led initiatives like food sovereignty labs
- Invest in Native American-led campus spaces with sustainable funding
- Integrate Native American food systems into campus sustainability efforts
- Create programs like Youth Councils and Indigenous Foods Festivals
- Develop community-based programs addressing climate change from Native American perspectives
- Encourage student involvement in Tribal-led projects and community-based learning
- Co-develop school and youth programs with Tribal communities

Institutional Structure and Accountability

Financial Commitment and Resource Allocation

Meaningful change requires significant, sustained financial investment.

Specific actions:

- Create a dedicated Native American fund (1-5% of UC earnings) for programs designed by and for Tribal communities
- Allocate a portion of state gaming revenue currently going to the general fund specifically to UC for Native programs and services
- Provide dedicated funding for Native American Centers, Native American Studies programs, and student support services
- Fund endowed faculty positions in Native American Studies across campuses
- Provide adequate resources for Tribal consultation processes (staff time, travel, honoraria)

Governance and Decision-Making Authority

Native faculty, staff, students, and Tribal representatives must have decision-making power, not just advisory roles.

Specific actions:

- Include Tribal representatives in UC governance structures with voting authority
- Create mechanisms for regular engagement with UC Regents on Native issues
- Ensure Native representation on campus committees, hiring committees, and strategic planning bodies
- Develop delegation of authority frameworks that recognize Tribal sovereignty
- Move beyond temporary working groups to permanent institutional structures

Communication and Coordination

Better communication across the UC system could accelerate progress and reduce duplication of effort.

Specific actions:

- Establish regular convenings of Native faculty and staff across UC campuses to share strategies and best practices
- Create a UC-wide coalition or network focused on Native American justice and accountability
- Improve institutional communication with Native students, faculty, and staff about opportunities and decisions
- Ensure intentional inclusion of Native community members in campus events and planning
- Reduce the isolation of Native faculty and staff through networking and mutual support

Hiring and Retention

Native representation in faculty and staff positions remains inadequate across the UC system.

Specific actions:

- Set targets and accountability measures for hiring Native faculty and staff
- Create cluster hires in Native American Studies and related fields
- Provide mentorship and support to reduce burnout and turnover
- Recognize and appropriately compensate service contributions
- Value community-engaged scholarship in tenure and promotion decisions
- Address the current imbalance where Native staff significantly outnumber faculty

Conflict Resolution and Campus Climate

Indigenous Peacemaking Practices

Karen Biestman's presentation demonstrated how Indigenous peacemaking can provide valuable frameworks for addressing conflict on campus.

Specific actions:

- Train facilitators in Indigenous peacemaking methodologies
- Offer peacemaking as an alternative to adversarial conflict resolution processes
- Apply peacemaking principles to roommate disputes, departmental conflicts, and campus controversies
- Use peacemaking frameworks when addressing divisive issues affecting campus communities
- Integrate peacemaking into leadership development programs

Authentic Land Acknowledgments

Land acknowledgments must evolve beyond scripted statements.

Specific actions:

- Name specific individuals, families, and living descendants in acknowledgments, not just Tribal names
- Connect acknowledgments to specific commitments and actions
- Regularly revisit and update acknowledgment language in consultation with Tribal communities
- Train campus community members on the history and significance of the Tribe(s) whose land they occupy
- Move from acknowledgment to accountability through measurable progress

Beyond UC: Regional and National Leadership

Regional Coordination

The UC can play a leadership role in coordinating efforts across California institutions and beyond.

Specific actions:

- Convene California institutions (UC and CSU) to share strategies and coordinate efforts
- Support collaboration among land-grant universities nationally
- Participate in networks like the Land Grant-Universities, focused on disrupting settler colonialism
- Share resources, research, and best practices widely

Policy Advocacy

The UC system has significant lobbying capacity that should be directed toward Native American justice.

Specific actions:

- Advocate for state and federal policies supporting Tribal sovereignty
- Lobby for increased Tribal access to public lands
- Support Tribal climate resilience funding
- Use institutional influence to advance Native American rights

Investment and Endowment Practices

University endowments may perpetuate ongoing land dispossession globally through investment choices.

Specific actions:

- Conduct analysis of how UC endowments invest in industries that threaten Native American lands (mining, oil, and gas)
- Develop ethical investment guidelines that protect Native American lands and rights
- Divest from industries causing harm to Native American communities
- Track and respond to violence against land defenders in regions where UC investments have an impact
- Make investment information transparent and accessible

Assessment and Transparency

Accurate Data Collection

Current data about Native students and communities was described as misleading, affecting leadership decisions.

Specific actions:

- Improve how Native students are counted and tracked in university data systems
- Disaggregate data to reflect diversity within Native student populations
- Partner with Tribes to develop culturally appropriate assessment measures
- Report outcomes transparently to Tribal communities and Native students
- Use data to drive accountability, not just for reporting requirements

Regular Reporting and Progress Updates

Accountability requires transparency about progress and setbacks.

Specific actions:

- Publish annual reports on progress toward stated commitments
- Create accessible dashboards tracking key metrics (enrollment, graduation, hiring, funding allocation)
- Report back to Tribal communities and symposium participants
- Acknowledge gaps and challenges honestly
- Adjust strategies based on feedback and outcomes

Barriers and Challenges

Participants identified several systemic barriers that must be addressed for meaningful progress:

Structural and Bureaucratic Obstacles

- UC's centralized data ownership policies conflict with data sovereignty principles
- Bureaucratic processes make timely and equitable compensation difficult
- Funding structures don't accommodate community-based research timelines
- Legal frameworks prioritize institutional protection over relationships
- Federal funding requirements may conflict with Tribal sovereignty (though alternatives exist)

Resource Constraints and Competing Priorities

- Native programs and students are sometimes disproportionately affected when systemwide or campus budget cuts occur.
- Institutions prioritize projects with measurable return on investment
- Short-term thinking prevents long-term relationship building
- Limited dedicated funding for Tribal consultation, engagement, and partnership
- Reluctance to redistribute resources from established programs

Cultural and Epistemological Differences

- Western academic frameworks conflict with Native American knowledge systems
- Universities operate on colonial time scales that don't accommodate relationship building
- Extractive research models remain dominant despite stated commitments to community engagement
- Difference between equity (treating everyone the same) and justice (addressing historical harms) is not well understood
- Failure to recognize difference between working with sovereign nations versus ethnic/racial groups

Political and Legal Complexity

- State constitutional requirements to maximize profit from trust lands
- Complex web of federal, state, and Tribal jurisdictions
- Federal policy shifts affecting support for equity-focused research and programs
- Lack of enforcement mechanisms for university commitments
- Legal barriers to land return even when institutional will exists

Insufficient Leadership and Will

- Symbolic gestures substitute for structural change
- Resistance from faculty and administrators protecting status quo
- "Consultation fatigue" where universities repeatedly ask for Tribal input without acting on it
- Lack of consequences when commitments are not fulfilled
- Tendency to treat Native American justice as a "diversity" issue rather than a fundamental institutional obligation

Examples of Progress and Promising Practices

While significant work remains, here are selected examples demonstrating that change is possible:

Institutional Commitments

- Brown University returned 255 acres to the Pokanoket Tribe
- The UC Native American Opportunity Plan provides free tuition to California residents who are enrolled in federally-recognized Tribes.
- Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria created $2.5 million scholarship fund for UC students from non-federally recognized Tribes
- UC Berkeley's ongoing work to reform compensation policies for research participants
- UC Davis examines land-grant responsibilities, including creating the position of Senior Strategic Advisor on Native American/Alaskan Native and First Nation Affairs and advocating for institutional change as a part of Grand Challenges Reimagining the Land-grant University.
- Development of educational modules at the University of Wisconsin
- South Dakota State University's Wokini Initiative involves Tribes from the whole state.
- UC Merced Tomoma Grove

Academic Programs and Curriculum

- Cal Poly Humboldt's degrees in Indigenous Science, Tribal Forestry, and Community Practice
- Integration of Native American Studies into science education at Humboldt
- Student-led creation of Rou Dalagurr Food Sovereignty Lab at Humboldt despite initial institutional resistance
- Additional Cal Poly Humboldt programs like Youth Council, Indigenous Foods Festival, and Kelp Guardians
- Development of peacemaking toolkits and training programs
- UC Davis Native American Studies Homeland history course
- UC Santa Barbara TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) course

Research and Documentation

- UC Tribal Lands Workgroup GIS inventory and policy development
- UC Agriculture and Natural Resources story map website developed in collaboration with the Hopland Band of Pomo Indians
- Joseph A. Myers Center for Research on Native American Issues, UC Berkeley
- Native Affairs Initiative, UC Davis
- UC Davis Grand Challenges Initiative- Benchmarking Land-grant University Institutional Practices by Kase Wheatley
- UC Irvine/UC Santa Barbara collaborative research on wildfire management with Tribes

- UC Santa Cruz Amah Mutsun Relearning Program
- UC Riverside California Center for Native Nations
- UC San Diego Critical Mission Studies

Partnership Agreements

- MOUs between UC Hopland Research and Extension Center and Hopland Band of Pomo Indians
- MOU between UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and Middletown Rancheria
- UCLA instituted an MOU with local tribes for Harvesting Gathering and Caretaking rights. There is also a portion of the botanical gardens dedicated to Native grasses, with agreement that community can harvest for basketry
- Co-stewardship agreements emerging in California and nationally
- Increasing number of consultation agreements (150+ on federal lands by end of 2024)
- International models like Australia's Indigenous Protected Areas

These examples demonstrate that progress is possible when institutions commit resources, share authority, and center Indigenous priorities.

What Success Looks Like

Participants were clear that success cannot be measured by UC's traditional metrics. Instead, success means:

- **Native students thriving** – not just enrolling but experiencing campus as a place where they and their communities are valued, where their knowledge systems are respected, and where they see pathways to support their nations
- **Tribes exercising authority** – over research conducted in their communities, over lands that were stolen from them, over how their histories are taught, and over how resources are allocated
- **Structural transformation** – not diversity initiatives added to existing structures, but fundamental changes in how UC operates, makes decisions, and allocates resources
- **Reciprocal relationships** – where UC both gives and receives, where partnerships are structured around mutual benefit, and where Tribal sovereignty is consistently honored
- **Accountability mechanisms** – with legal force, community oversight, and consequences for failing to meet commitments

The Path Forward

Moving from this symposium to sustained action requires several concurrent efforts:

Immediate Actions

- Establish system-wide requirements for Tribal IRB approval where applicable
- Create a Native American fund (1-5% of UC earnings) designed by Tribal communities

- Provide free tuition and housing for Native students
- Conduct an inventory of historical research data collected from Tribes
- Develop UC-wide guidelines for Tribal engagement that recognize sovereignty
- Increase Tribal representation in hiring, campus committees, and programming

Medium-Term Commitments

- Launch joint research initiatives with Tribes on climate, agriculture, and socio-cultural topics
- Implement land back or co-stewardship agreements with specific Tribes
- Establish required Native American Studies courses across majors
- Create Tribal land trusts and formalize repatriation protocols
- Reform data access policies to recognize Native American data sovereignty
- Develop place-based mentorship programs connecting Native students with their communities

Long-Term Transformation

- Fundamentally restructure UC's relationship to occupied lands
- Create endowments providing ongoing resources determined by Tribal priorities
- Integrate Native American knowledge systems across science and environmental programs
- Establish Tribal authority in campus decision-making processes
- Develop models of reciprocal partnership that other institutions can learn from
- Measure success by outcomes defined by Native Nations, not simply institutional metrics

A Call to Leadership

This symposium brought together faculty, staff, students, and Tribal leaders who have been working toward institutional accountability. Their presentations revealed both the depth of historical harm and the concrete pathways toward repair. Their discussions identified specific barriers and actionable solutions.

Now UC leadership must decide whether these conversations will lead to transformation or remain academic exercises. Will the university commit resources commensurate with the scale of benefit it has derived from stolen land? Will it restructure decision-making to honor Tribal sovereignty? Will it measure success by outcomes defined by Native Nations rather than institutional metrics?

The path forward requires courage, humility, and sustained investment. It requires acknowledging that universities don't have all the answers and that Native Nations must be recognized as authorities, not subjects of study. It requires uncomfortable conversations about power, resources, and accountability.

But as multiple speakers emphasized, this responsibility is also an *opportunity*. The knowledge, resilience, and vision that Native communities offer are precisely what universities—and society—need to navigate current challenges.

The time for symbolic gestures has passed. The time for action is now.

Misplaced Trust: Land Grab Universities: Past, Present, Future

Presented by Tristan Ahtone (Kiowa), Journalist, and Robert Lee, Associate Professor of History, University of Cambridge

A video recording of this talk is available here.

In the opening keynote address, “Misplaced Trust: Land Grab Universities: Past, Present and Future,” Tristan Ahtone and Robert Lee, co-authors of “Land-Grab Universities” and “Misplaced Trust” provided a history of the establishment of land-grant universities as well as other U.S. land laws that still benefit land-grant universities, state governments, and educational institutions through the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and resources. In addition, they describe how this system of wealth transfer has also exacerbated the climate crisis.

I. Introduction

Ahtone introduces the discussion by examining two of the presenters’ key investigations. The first story is "Land Grab Universities," published in *High Country News* in 2020, which focuses on the Morrill Act of 1862, a pivotal piece of legislation that granted land to colleges, setting the foundation for the land-grant university system. This investigation examines how this system was built on land dispossession from Indigenous communities. The second is a 2023 *Grist* article, "Misplaced Trust," which expands on the ideas from "Land Grab Universities" by examining how other land laws have benefited and continue to benefit land-grant institutions. “Misplaced Trust” also shifts the focus to the dispossession of Native lands now owned by state governments within reservations that produce revenue for state universities, hospitals, and prisons. The presenters discuss the ongoing process of dispossession, the barriers to returning land to Indigenous Nations, and how land grants are a fundamental colonial activity reframed as business and fiscal policy.

II. Historical Context: Colonial Roots of Land Grants

While the 1862 Morrill Act is often the focus of land-grant university histories, it was part of a broader, long-standing pattern of land dispossession from Indigenous nations. Lee offers a historical perspective on land grants broadly as a colonial practice, noting that the practice of land grants used to fund institutions dates to as early as the late 16th century in Ireland with Trinity College Dublin.

The land-grant practice was quickly adopted in the American colonies; examples are the Henrico College in colonial Virginia and Harvard University’s grant of Pequot Land in the 1650s. Lee asserts the practice is so widespread it is difficult to find colleges established in the 17th and 18th centuries that did NOT receive land grants.

After the American Revolution, this trend continues and, in fact, expands. The colonial era continues, and Lee demonstrates that this colonial history in North America is a continuous process that persists into the 21st century, “Colonial History is ongoing. It hasn’t stopped.”

In the early 19th century, land-grant legislation included one-off examples such as Jefferson College (no longer exists) in Mississippi, established on Choctaw land as early as 1803. Throughout the 19th century, there was a more structured approach, primarily through state enabling acts. The 1850s is typically when the history of land-grant colleges starts.

III. The Morrill Act and Land-Grant Universities

The Morrill Act of 1862 nationalized and expanded these land-theft practices that had been applied on a more ad hoc basis previously. Land grants were used to fund institutions such as Michigan State and Penn State, which offered practical education for mechanical, agricultural, and industrial classes. The idea was social uplift for the white majority by providing agricultural, mechanical, and industrial education to the masses or middle classes.

The impetus for increasing the availability of practical and agricultural education came from places such Vermont, where societies were looking for ways to increase their agricultural productivity. In the 1850s, Justin Morrill supported an initial version of the land-grant university bill, which did not pass. In 1862, the Morrill Act passed and resulted in the redistribution of land taken from Indigenous nations, either through treaties or seizures, to promote economic development. The Morrill Act was often referred to as the Agricultural College Act. The Morrill Act was often discussed and celebrated for the resulting in “democracy’s colleges,” but the story of the origin of these colleges was infrequently examined or told.

The passage of the Morrill Act coincided with the passage of the Homestead Act and Pacific Railroad Act. All three Acts involved the core practice of redistributing Indigenous lands and either selling them to raise revenue or giving it away. Lee highlights how these land grants, intended to fuel economic growth and western expansion, were often built on the backs of dispossessed Indigenous peoples.

The Morrill Act promised states between 90,000 and 990,000 acres of stolen lands, depending on the size of the congressional delegation (and the state’s population). The states, in turn, sold these lands to raise funds for new colleges. There was a common misconception that the land grants were used to provide a physical location for campuses; however, this was primarily a form of wealth transfer where the beneficiaries were hundreds or thousands of miles away from the Indigenous land grants, the intention of which was to fuel economic growth to support westward expansion. In the original “Land-Grab Universities” report, Ahtone and Lee demonstrated that “land-grant universities were built not just on Indigenous land but with Indigenous land.”

The results of the Morrill Act land grants include the acquisition of nearly 11 million acres of land, which were acquired through approximately 160 violence-backed treaties and then distributed to 52 land-grant universities. Most of this land was sold off and netted approximately $500,000,000 (2020 dollars adjusted for inflation).

These lands were often sold for massive profits. For example, the University of Nebraska, which capitalized on almost 90,000 acres of land from Native Nations (Omaha, Pawnee, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho), funded a very small institution. The University of Nebraska's first graduating class was just 20 students.

IV. California's Unique Role

California played a key role in the Morrill Act land-grant universities. Not only did the University of California profit from land grants derived from Indigenous lands, but Lee states that approximately 25% of all Morrill Act land grants originated in California for various other beneficiaries in virtually every other state. Furthermore, Lee emphasizes that the Morrill Act occurred during the time of the genocide of California Indians. The relationship between the land grants and the state's violent history remains largely under-researched.

V. Misplaced Trust: State Trust Lands

The presenters expanded their investigation with "The Misplaced Trust Investigation" (2024), published in *Grist,* to examine other land laws and the state trust lands (the inspiration for the Morrill Act) that benefit public institutions. State trust lands were created through enabling acts as territories became states. As the U.S. expanded, Indigenous homelands became U.S. territories and then states; through this process, the U.S. government donated expropriated Native land to states to support state-building efforts. While the primary purpose of the state trust lands was to benefit education, their beneficiaries went well beyond, including state penitentiaries, hospitals, and fish hatcheries, among other institutions.

Lands were surveyed using the Public Land Survey System, which created a grid system dividing land into parcels and designated certain sections for institutions like schools, hospitals, and universities. Townships were developed measuring six miles by six miles, which they were subdivided into one-mile square sections. Of these 36 Sections, Sections 16 and 36 of each township were typically reserved for K–12 education. The original intention was to sell land to produce revenue to support public institutions. However, over time, states shifted from selling land to leasing it for long-term revenue, including agriculture and extractive industries (oil, logging, mining, and fracking).

The researchers narrowed their investigation to the 500 million acres? of state trust lands to examine state trust lands that benefited and, in many cases, continue to benefit land-grant universities. Two important aspects of the state trust lands are that the beneficiaries do not have a say in how they make money (up to state agencies) and states are legally required to maximize profits. States would need to modify their state constitutions in order to change this requirement.

The investigation found 14 land-grant universities benefited from more than 8 million acres of surface and subsurface state trust lands taken from 123 Tribes. The authors state that these state trust lands generated $6.7 billion in revenue for states between 2018 and 2022. In contrast, Indigenous nations received only $4.7 million in compensation. Ahtone acknowledges

that these payments were disproportionately distributed to Tribes, several of which were not compensated at all.

The investigation examined specifically how land was being used and found that 25% of trust lands benefiting land-grant universities are used for fossil fuel extraction or mining of minerals, and only 0.25% for renewables. This practice contradicts the climate pledges recently adopted by many universities. Ahtone points out that although universities do not control the state land trust use directly, they have an opportunity to lobby and influence policy decisions, as evidenced by the expenditure of $4.6 million spent in 2022 to influence other policies through the universities' lobbying efforts.

Ahtone and Lee conducted a detailed analysis of the lifetime profit from one university, Washington State University (WSU), through timber sales on state trust lands. Their findings were that WSU received $1.1 billion from timber sales on trust lands, while the Yakama Nation, whose land was taken, received only $520,000. As additional context, the Yakama Tribe signed their 1855 treaty, which signed over 10 million acres of their land in Central Washington, under the threat of extreme violence, illustrating the coercive nature of land acquisition.

The team was able to conduct this very detailed and time-consuming research for a few case studies. The data is relatively accessible and warrants further examination for other universities.

One unanticipated finding of this research was state trust lands within the boundaries of reservations. It became apparent that the Yakama Nation, Tohono O'odam, and the Uintah and Ouray Reservations all include state trust lands within the boundaries of their reservations. The team discovered over 2 million acres of state trust lands within 80 different reservations. As an example, in Utah, there are more than half a million acres that primarily benefit K-12 schools as well as other schools. Grazing is the predominant lease activity; however, more than half of the lands is classified for oil and gas mining. Ahtone describes the systemic theft that continues to be perpetrated. Public institutions rely on Indigenous land to avoid tax increases or budget cuts. The data clearly indicates that settlers and institutions still rely on revenue from Indigenous lands.

While some may ask what benefit Native people receive from these state trust lands, many Native students may attend Bureau of Indian Education schools or tribal colleges, or receive benefits from Indian Health Services, all of which receive federal funding, not revenue from state trust lands.

While several Tribes recently received Federal Tribal Climate Tribal Resilience awards as climate change threatens their homelands, Indigenous communities lack control over their own resources, while their reservation lands are being mined for resources.

VI. Land-Grant University Futures

Lee acknowledged that there is still so much that is unknown about land-grant university history and its impact. Ahtone also acknowledged the large team of approximately 50-60 people credited with bringing the work together. It is an area of growing scholarship and needs interdisciplinary land-grant university researchers to continue to propel the work. He is excited to

see a growing academic interest that has led to interdisciplinary research and curriculum development. He cites examples, including educational modules at the University of Wisconsin and reparations discussions in Minnesota, Arizona, and California. However, at the same time, he is concerned that policy changes resulting from these academic studies will be much slower. At a time when federal support for equity-focused research is declining, he is particularly concerned with the future of this work. To end on a small but positive example, Brown University recently returned 255 acres to the Pokanoket Tribe. While the land's value to the university may not have been significant, the gesture is a small but important step in the right direction.

Keynote by Greg Sarris, University of California Regent and Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria

A video recording of this talk is available here.

Greg Sarris, University of California Regent and Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, highlighted historical injustices, current challenges, and the University of California's responsibilities to Native people. He emphasizes the need for reciprocal partnerships between universities and Tribes, tuition equity for all California Indians, regardless of recognition status.

I. Introduction: Beyond Land Acknowledgments

Regent and Chair Greg Sarris began by acknowledging Yocha Dehe and the Patwin Tribes, at the same time challenging the adequacy of land acknowledgments, describing them as insufficient and likening them to "sales receipts for land that was stolen." Chair Sarris acknowledges Patwin people with whom he has been connected including Harry Lorenzo, Francis McDaniels, Harriet, Marshall McKay, Paula Lorenzo, the Tribal Council, and so many others. He states that true acknowledgment must honor living descendants and ancestors, naming individuals and families.

II. Historical Context: Layers of Oppression

Sarris provides a historical overview, focusing on California's unique experience of colonization. Prior to the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862 (which caused 11 million acres of Native land to be seized and sold), California, which became a state in 1850, established institutional and systemic structures to commit violence against the state's Indigenous people.

Sarris explains that California's first act as a state was to pass legislation legalizing Indian slavery, influenced by Spanish and Portuguese Catholic colonizers, such as General Vallejo. Indian slavery was passed under the guise of "protection" but persisted even after the Civil War, not being repealed until 1868. Indentured servitude and Indian slavery were masked under leasing and vagrancy laws. While California was never technically a "slavery state," Native families were being separated, and California Indian people were sold on streetcorners.

During the Gold Rush Era, federally financed vigilante groups were massacring Native communities and getting paid for it. In the Bay Area, laws were passed to prevent cultural burning (fire management). In 1910, the California Rancheria Act was passed for "homeless Indians." The government relocated communities to 15 acres of land creating Rancherias. In 1958, the California Indian Rancheria Termination Act stripped Tribes of sovereignty and land, often through coercion and misinformation. Chair Sarris provides an example from Graton

Rancheria where the majority of the community was out harvesting fruit, and exploitative and misleading practices led to the Rancheria losing its land and sovereignty.

Chair Sarris acknowledges that many California Tribes were never recognized by the federal government. California was home to hundreds of nations and diverse language families, living sustainably and peacefully. Chair Sarris demonstrates that California Indians were decimated in place rather than removed.

III. UC's Responsibility as a Land-Grant Institution

Sarris connects this history to the University of California's obligations. Reflecting on the state's history, he urges universities to build reciprocal partnerships with Tribes. Chair Sarris states, "Your responsibility to us will become your opportunity. You need us." He points out that both the financial support that Tribes are providing to UC as well as Tribes' traditional knowledge offer opportunities for partnerships.

He advocates for tuition-free education for all California Indians, regardless of federal recognition status. The Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria are giving $2.5 million in scholarships, in perpetuity, for students from non-federally recognized Tribes to go to UC tuition-free. Chair Sarris questions why the Tribe needed to provide this funding.

Chair Sarris urges the University to create true reciprocal relationships where students can see that they are valued in the educational system, as opposed to extractive models that just remove Indigenous knowledge. In order to recruit Native students, creating relevant models where the University is working with the families and the entire community is important. Success for Native students must involve families. Integrating Indigenous ecological practices into academic programs is also imperative to create meaningful curriculum for Native students.

Chair Sarris acknowledges that this takes resources. California Indian Gaming generates an annual revenue equal to the entertainment industry. He states that there needs to be more sharing of resources. He does not like that there is a disparity between big casino Tribes and those with no casinos or small casinos. In addition, a lot of resources go to the state's general fund, which is allocated by the Governor. Chair Sarris proposes that some of this funding be allocated to the UC for education and dedicated programs that serve Native communities.

IV. Vision for the Future

Sarris dreams of a future where groups are working together for the benefit of all ethics of reciprocity and collective care. He warns of ecological collapse and urges humility, shared responsibility, and cultural continuity.

Peacemaking as Conflict Resolution

Presented by Karen Biestman (Cherokee), J.D., Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Equity and Inclusion at University of California, San Diego

A video recording of this talk is available here.

I. Introduction and Background

Karen Biestman, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Equity and Inclusion at University of California, San Diego, presented “Peacemaking as Conflict Resolution,” emphasizing Indigenous peacemaking as a principle for addressing conflict and provided examples of its use in academic settings. Biestman described her own journey into learning Indigenous peacemaking, centered around teachings from family and friends. Throughout Biestman’ s career at UC Berkeley, Stanford, and UC San Diego, she has integrated Indigenous peacemaking principles into academic and community contexts, “not just as an alternative, but as the preferred model.” These frameworks emphasize healing, restoring relationships, and centering values, making them highly relevant to higher education institutions facing conflict and division.

II. Principles and Practices of Peacemaking

Peacemaking is a community-based, values-based Indigenous framework to address harm and conflict and to focus on healing and restoring relationships between impacted parties. This is a global, community-based, culturally informed method of communicating and navigating difficult conversations, which prioritizes healing and rather than adversarial outcomes.

As Biestman states, “It's a way of being. It's a way of knowing. It's a way of teaching. It's a way of sharing, but the purpose is to ground us all in our values, and those values are connected to places and when we can bring that together, we can affect change that promotes understanding and ultimately heals the fractures that we experience in community, in relationships, and on campus.” This model stands in contrast to the Western law system’s adversarial, rights-based approach. Tribal justice is based on responsibility, rather than individual rights.

The practice is described as simple, but not easy. Participants sit in a circle to eliminate power imbalances. Use of a ‘talking piece’ ensures equitable participation and intentional listening. Values are emphasized—participants identify personal values and their origins to ground discussions. Values such as honesty, transparency, love, kindness, sharing and making space for others are often named. Participants are asked to be bound by their values. Peacemaking requires voluntary and consensual participation and should not be used for violation of academic policies. Guidelines include listening with respect, speaking only for oneself, and no interrupting. The goal is seeking consensus, not winning.

Biestman references *Integrating Indigenous Peacemaking in the Academy,* the masters thesis of one of her advisees: Niyolpaqui Moraza-Keeswood, who found that there was an enormous opportunity to implement peacemaking in academic settings. It could be a valuable tool in many academic departments and situations. While teaching at the Stanford Design School, Biestman recognized the synergy between peacemaking and the designing process. Design often begins with empathy mapping. With empathy mapping you need to understand the other party's feelings before reaching a conclusion.

Peacemaking allows people to:

- Maintain shared values in living and learning environments
- Incorporate active student participation, learning and development into fair process
- Develop listening for understanding skills
- Acknowledge harm
- Center wellbeing of community
- Collectively repair harm and repair relationships.

Peacemaking can be used in a variety of ways; some examples include:

- Advocate for a policy change that (in)directly impacts the wellness of students
- Resolve disputes between roommates or neighbors
- Address problematic faculty behavior and/or curriculum content
- Engage in discussions where inherent power dynamics from administration may influence
  honest and respectful engagement
- Unpack divisive cohort dynamics and begin rebuilding community
- Gain guidance/feedback on a proposed program/initiative

III. Case Studies

Biestman provided examples of how peacemaking has provided a valuable structure and process for conflict resolution on campuses, including Stanford and UC San Diego. The Stanford Renaming Initiative was a six-year movement, led by students, to rename campus landmarks associated with Father Serra, the architect of the California Mission System. Related activism included student resolutions, forums, panel discussions, academic courses, and marches. It was a huge movement. One student representative, Carson Smith, was presented on video describing her participation as an undergraduate on the Renaming Committee to bring ideas and thoughts to the table. She described a pivotal moment when the Renaming Committee reached out to the Native American Cultural Center to request to meet with Native students. Biestman agreed to meet as long as the meeting would take place at the Native American Center, who would also facilitate the conversation.

Carson Smith structured a circle and framed questions based on harm. Peacemaking forces one to get out of their head and into their heart. Students recounted the impact of harms such as intergenerational trauma, genocide, and forced displacement. Committee members practiced intentional listening with deep respect. This peacemaking conversation was a transformative moment. The Committee members could hear the harm that students experienced and connect

the harm to a policy. The Committee recommended to the Board of Trustees and Campus President that three campus landmarks dedicated to Serra be renamed. Students spoke to overall improved relationships because of this process and the increased recognition across campus of the Muwekma Ohlone, whose land the campus sits on. Students spoke about how this helped administration understand Native student perspectives and create positive change.

Biestman also described the UC Berkeley Executive Leadership Academy at the Center for Studies in Higher Education, tailored to rising college presidents. The curriculum focuses on 26 skill sets, including conflict resolution.

At UC San Diego, Biestman launched a new program 'Dialogue 4 Peace,' as well as 'Tritons for Peace' under the 'Tritons Belong' initiative. Both initiatives are compassion and education-centered, developed after October 7, 2023, to enable dialogue and understanding. 'Dialogue 4 Peace' aims to build understanding and compassion across differences. It is designed for students, faculty, and staff and includes a fellowship program, summit, and toolkit resources.

IV. Closing

Biestman reiterates the benefits of the peacemaking process and value in academic settings. She quotes one of her students, "Knowledge is power, but understanding is liberation." Peacemaking promotes both understanding and healing, essential for higher education in times of division. Indigenous peacemaking is foundational to restorative justice.

Breakout Session: Co-Stewardship of Land

Presented by Adina Merenlender, Professor of Cooperative Extension in Conservation Science, Hopland Research and Extension Center, UC Berkeley

Adina Merenlender provided a framework regarding co-stewardship to prompt a discussion about the goals, challenges, and practices around co-stewardship agreements. Co-stewardship agreements between public agencies and institutions and Indigenous Peoples are collaborative arrangements that can involve shared decision-making and enable Indigenous stewardship practices to be carried out on public lands and waters. These agreements can support cultural revitalization while also advancing biological conservation and ecosystem resilience. Although the term often encompasses co-management and other joint arrangements, co-stewardship emphasizes a broader ethic grounded in Indigenous values of relationships, reciprocity, and respect, viewing people as part of nature with responsibilities to maintain ecological balance. In practice, co-stewardship brings together Indigenous knowledge and Western science to advance place-based stewardship, restoration, and community engagement. While these agreements hold considerable promise, they can be difficult to negotiate and implement because they require mutual respect, trust, and the ability to reconcile different perspectives. As partnerships between public agencies and Indigenous communities expand, there is an increasing need to learn from existing agreements to understand their outcomes and improve future efforts.

Merenlender provided some contextual information that co-stewardship agreements are on the rise in the USA and Canada. By 2024, U.S. federal agencies had entered into **hundreds of co-stewardship agreements with Tribal Nations**, with dozens of new land and water-based agreements added each year. Internationally, there was an increase as well. In 2017, 69% of all Canadian federal crown land was managed through some form of advisory relationship with Indigenous partners. Australia is on the leading edge of Indigenous stewardship and has identified 89 Indigenous Protected Areas.

In California, there have been additional movements towards co-stewardship. The California Biodiversity Network Initiative hosted the Indigenous Co-stewardship of Public Lands: Lessons for the Future convening in 2024. The UC Tribal Lands Workgroup was established by the Office of the President. The Workgroup completed a GIS Inventory of UC land, with an overlay of Tribal homelands, prepared an inventory of existing UC MOUs and agreements with Tribes, and drafted guidelines for engaging Tribes about the use of UC land, as well as decision-making recommendations for delegation of authority.

Merelender provided the Hopland Research and Extension Center as an example. A storymap website was developed in collaboration with the Hopland Band of Pomo Indians to share the land history of the Center. A Memorandum of Understanding between UCANR and the Tribe was developed to provide the framework for future activities such as prescribed /cultural burns, access for gathering, school and youth programs with the Hopland Band, and joint research projects.

Group Discussion

Several participants emphasized the primary goal for University of California (UC) lands should be "Land Back," positioning Indigenous Tribes as the ultimate authorities with the university serving in a supporting partnership role. Participants emphasized that co-stewardship is merely an intermediate step toward this goal, as current agreements often feel paternalistic and lack equal decision-making power. In the short term, the University should prioritize restorative justice by facilitating Tribal access for cultural practices, such as traditional burning to enhance basketry materials and plant resilience. This shift requires formal reckoning and an apology for institutional harms.

A significant portion of the discussion addressed the structural barriers and power imbalances inherent in the UC system. Participants acknowledged that the attendees were primarily UC staff, faculty, and students. Tribes were not represented in the group. Participants noted that the University often centers its own benefits rather than those of Indigenous communities, suggesting a need for engagement with the UC Regents to avoid empty promises. Concrete actions discussed include creating legally binding agreements- such as cultural easements or repatriation protocols- to move beyond temporary "goodwill" arrangements. Furthermore, there are calls for the University to provide financial restitution through endowments and to utilize Native Law Centers to ensure legal processes support Tribal sovereignty rather than institutional self-interest.

Breakout Session: Place-Based Education and Homeland History: The University as an Educational Space Beyond the Classroom

Presented by Cutcha Risling Baldy (Hupa, Yurok, Karuk), Associate Professor of Native American Studies at Cal Poly Humboldt. Her presentation centered on place-based education at Cal Poly Humboldt, offering insights from her leadership in advancing Native-led academic and environmental initiatives that incorporate community engagement.

I. Key Themes

- **Indigenizing education and land stewardship**: Advocating for trauma-informed, community-based conservation practices that center Indigenous knowledge and long-term sustainability.
- **Critiquing co-colonialism and climate colonialism:** Critiquing the ongoing exploitation of Native lands under the guise of environmentalism, including greenwashing and colonial conservation.
- **Curriculum transformation at Cal Poly Humboldt**: Native American Studies has become integral to science education, with new degrees and concentrations in Indigenous Science, Tribal Forestry, and Community Practice.
- **Student-led initiatives at Cal Poly Humboldt:** The Rou Dalagurr Food Sovereignty Lab was created through student advocacy and fundraising, despite initial institutional resistance.
- **Community engagement**: Programs like the Youth Council, Indigenous Foods Festival, and Kelp Guardians address food sovereignty and climate change.
- **Policy and advocacy:** Efforts include the Land Back Symposium and pushing for Tribal land trusts and repatriation of Native ancestors and cultural items.
- **Challenges and persistence**: Dr. Baldy encouraged students to challenge institutional refusals, advocating for free housing and parking on campus

II. Recommendations

Throughout Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy's presentation, the following recommendations were included, relating directly to her insights and experiences both as faculty at Cal Poly Humboldt and previously as a student at UC Davis. These recommendations centered on the advancement of place-based education, land stewardship, and Native student support at institutions of higher education.

- **Institutional Support for Native Programs**
  - Require Native American Studies (NAS) courses as a core requirement across disciplines.
  - Fund Indigenous-led spaces like the Rou Dalagurr Food Sovereignty Lab to ensure sustainability and autonomy.
- **Land Back and Tribal Stewardship**
  - Support Land-Back initiatives through policy and partnerships.
  - Establish co-management agreements with Tribal nations for campus lands and conservation areas.
  - Recognize and validate Tribal ownership and sovereignty in all land-related decisions through consultation and partnership.
- **Curriculum and Research Reform**
  - Develop new degree programs in Indigenous Science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
  - Promote trauma-informed and historically reframed land management practices in ecological fields of study.
  - Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration that centers Indigenous methodologies and relational research ethics
  - Treat the UCD Native American Studies department as a model for other UC campuses
  - Require Native American Studies (NAS) courses as a core requirement across disciplines.
- **Student Advocacy and Equity**
  - Provide free housing and parking for Native students as reparative justice on stolen land.
  - Increase mentorship and community-building opportunities for Indigenous students.
  - Support student-led initiatives with flexible funding and administrative backing.
- **Community Engagement and Food Sovereignty**
  - Invest in community-based programs like the Youth Council, Indigenous Foods Festival, and Kelp Guardians.
  - Integrate Indigenous food systems and ecological knowledge into campus sustainability efforts.
  - Increase place-based mentorship and community-building opportunities for Indigenous students.

Breakout Session: Supporting Native Students on Campus

Presented by Michelle Villegas-Frazier (Pomo, Pinoleville), Senior Strategic Advisor on Native American/Alaska Native and First Nations Affairs, UC Davis; and Phenocia Bauerle (Apsáalooké), Director of Native American Thriving, Native American Student Development, and the Native Community Center, UC Berkeley.

This breakout session examined systemic inequities facing Native American students, staff, and faculty in higher education, particularly within the UC and CSU systems, and explored ways to better support Native students. Speakers shared lived experiences, institutional challenges, and emerging strategies for change.

I. Key Themes

- **Data Masking and Invisibility:** Native students are often miscounted or misclassified, creating the illusion that institutions are performing well in both admissions and retention. Comparatively small population sizes make Native communities easy to overlook and underprioritize in funding and strategic planning. Additionally, institutions may report hundreds of students as "Native," while only a handful meaningfully identify or remain connected, leading leadership to believe no action is needed for student support.
- **Structural, Not Individual, Problems:** The root issue is systemic and institutional, not a lack of effort by Native students or staff. Native issues are frequently siloed within advisory committees or cultural centers without real institutional authority. Native staff and scholars are excluded from key decisions, including hiring, speaker selection, and policy development. Some examples discussed in the session were Native students and staff being invited to events but left without seating, or events featuring Native speakers being planned without Native student, staff, or faculty involvement.
- **Burden on a Few Individuals**: One or two Native individuals often carry disproportionate emotional, political, and labor burdens for the entire institution. They are expected to educate others, represent all Native peoples, support students, and address systemic issues without adequate institutional authority, resources, or rest. Participants emphasized the need to move away from numbers-based logic, which can justify not providing a smaller group on campus with adequate resources, and instead recognize that Native issues are central to a university's land-grant missions, legal obligations, and historical responsibility.

II. Recommendations

Despite exhaustion, participants expressed cautious optimism, citing increased dialogue, stronger frameworks (e.g., "centering the margins"), and growing cross-campus coordination. A key recommendation was regular convenings of Native faculty, staff, and administrators to share strategies, align systems, and reduce isolation.The group stressed the need for solutions-

driven approaches and highlighted the importance of Native representation in hiring, campus committees, and programming. It was noted that Native staff outnumber faculty, underscoring the need to hire more Native faculty and to provide more leadership opportunities for Native staff.

Native people in higher education are not solely seeking visibility; they are demanding structural change, institutional accountability, and respect. Progress requires treating Native issues as institutional responsibilities supported by leadership, policy change, and meaningful allyship, not symbolic gestures or goodwill alone.

Breakout Session: Tribal-University Research Partnerships: Data Sovereignty and More

Presented by Dr. Nicole Halmai (Diné/Navajo, Choctaw), Postdoctoral Researcher, Genome Center, UC Davis.

Dr. Halmai provided an overview of both the long history of exploitative research conducted “on” (not with) Native Americans and an alternative approach: Indigenous data sovereignty, or the right of Indigenous peoples and nations (regardless of federal or state recognition) to govern collection, ownership, and application of their own data.

Dr. Halmai explained the critical intersection of **Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov)** and ethical Tribal-University research partnerships, presenting the CARE Principles for Data Governance as a way to operationalize IDSov.

I. Historical Context and Research Trauma

For centuries, the mainstream research community has collected samples and knowledge from Indigenous peoples without informed consent, often failing to return benefits or share profits with the communities involved. Dr. Halmai cited the Havasupai Tribe v. Arizona Board of Regents (2004) case as a pivotal example of these failures. In this case, DNA samples donated for diabetes research were used for unrelated studies without the donors' knowledge. This violation led to a legal victory for the Tribe, including $700,000 in compensation and the return of DNA samples, but it also resulted in a "Banishment Order" against the university's researchers. As a result of this and many other similar examples, "research" is often viewed as a "dirty word" in Indigenous contexts.

II. Defining Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov)

Dr. Halmai defines **Indigenous Data** as all information generated by Indigenous Peoples or about their territories, environments, and non-human relatives. Indigenous data includes:

- Cultural and traditional knowledge.
- Artwork, storytelling, and ceremonies.
- Biospecimens, ancestral remains, and genomic data.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov) is the inherent right of Indigenous nations to govern the collection, ownership, and application of this data. This right is recognized internationally by the **2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).**

III. The CARE Principles for Data Governance

The **CARE Principles**, developed by the Global Indigenous Data Alliance (GIDA) to center "people and purpose" in research, are a way to operationalize IDSov.

- **Collective Benefit:** Data ecosystems must be designed so Indigenous Peoples derive benefits from the data.
- **Authority to Control:** Researchers must recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests in their data and respect their authority to govern it.
- **Responsibility:** Those working with the data have a duty to demonstrate how it supports Indigenous self-determination.
- **Ethics:** The rights and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples must be the primary concern throughout the entire data life cycle.

IV. Considerations for Future Partnerships

Dr. Halmai concluded with actionable strategies for building ethical research partnerships:

- Co-develop research questions with Tribal partners BEFORE pursuing research project
- Utilize Indigenous methods of data collection and analysis based on Tribal partner preferences and policies
- Build the training of Indigenous members into research plans to create sustainable research solutions
- Co-develop agreements on data ownership, storage, and (re)sharing with Tribal partners PRIOR to data collection
- Co-develop agreements on benefits-sharing, effort acknowledgement, and right to use research results for Tribal partner capacity-building PRIOR to data collection

V. Discussion

After Dr. Halmai's presentation, attendees had a discussion about how to promote more equitable Tribal-university research partnerships. Several problems and opportunities for action were identified:

- None of the UCs require that researchers obtain Tribal IRB approval in order to get UC IRB approval. This must be changed.
- We need to build researcher capacity for true partnerships beyond just checking a box for consultation.
- UC's data access policy is that the UC owns all the data, and some funders (especially government agencies) have requirements regarding data sharing, which presuppose that data should be public. It is possible to get approval from funders for data access that recognize Indigenous data sovereignty, but researchers need training on these alternatives.
- Compensation is often inequitable and cumbersome. Tribes and Native individuals should be compensated every step of the way from co-creating research proposals and

questions to data collection to analysis to data storage and dissemination. UC bureaucracy makes this complicated (eg gift card process). There is ongoing work to change these policies at some campuses (eg UC Berkeley), but it is still a problem.

- UC researchers have collected extensive data from Tribes in the past, and making that available to Tribes now would be a contribution (eg Breath of Life). Many Tribes do not know what happened to data from past studies or how to access it. Finding these data and sharing them with Tribes would be a contribution (Tribes may also then request that some of the data be returned to them and no longer be made accessible to researchers from outside their Tribe). Doing this kind of inventory systematically would be a major undertaking, but it's possible to start small.

Conclusion

The symposium provided an overview of how the University of California (UC) and other land-grant universities continue to benefit from Indigenous land dispossession, presented some preliminary steps that have been taken throughout UC to repair this harm, and addressed the need for extensive future action. Keynote addresses and interactive sessions offered an opportunity for attendees to learn and exchange ideas.

Tristan Ahtone and Robert Lee, authors of the *Land-Grant Universities* series, presented an overview of state trust lands throughout the United States. State trust lands are Indigenous land that the U.S. government allocated to states to support state-building efforts. The primary purpose of the state trust lands was to benefit education, including higher education. States then sold or leased the land to generate revenue. Many land-grant universities still receive revenue from state trust lands, which are now generally leased for agriculture and extractive industries (oil, logging, mining and fracking).

Karen Biestman, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Equity and Inclusion at University of California, San Diego, presented a case study of Indigenous peacekeeping, an intensive conflict resolution practice that has been successfully used at Stanford, UC Berkeley, and UC San Diego with Native and non-Native stakeholders. This approach can be scaled up throughout UC and beyond to address harm and conflict and to promote healing and restoring relationships between impacted parties.

Greg Sarris, University of California Regent and Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, gave an overview of California Indian history and emphasized the responsibility of the University of California to take steps to redress the exploitative history. Just as strongly, he asserted that UC needs the knowledge, resilience, and vision of Native communities to navigate current challenges. Reciprocal relationships are key to achieving a thriving and equitable UC.

The symposium ended with a session led by Merri Lopez-Keifer, Executive Director, Center for Indigenous Law & Justice, UC Berkeley Law, that brought participants together to debrief the four breakout discussions focused on advancing Indigenous sovereignty, equity, and accountability within UC. The breakout sessions addressed: (1) Tribal–University Research Partnerships and Data Sovereignty; (2) Place-Based Education and Homeland History; (3) Supporting Native Students on Campus; and (4) Co-Stewardship of UC Lands. Across all groups, participants emphasized the need for structural change, long-term commitments, and shared decision-making between the university and Native Nations.

A central theme across keynotes and sessions was **the importance of moving beyond symbolic engagement toward meaningful power sharing**. Participants consistently noted that consultation alone is insufficient; instead, Tribes must be recognized as equal partners with authority in decision-making, particularly in research governance, land stewardship, and

institutional policy development. Trust-building was identified as essential, especially given the university's historical role in land dispossession and extractive research practices.

The **Tribal–University Research Partnerships and Data Sovereignty** group highlighted the need for clearer alignment of values before research begins, including co-developed agreements that center Tribal priorities. Participants emphasized reforming Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes to require compliance with Tribal IRBs where applicable, improving ethical compensation practices, and clarifying data ownership and access. Data sovereignty was identified as a critical issue, with strong consensus that Tribes must retain control over how their data and cultural knowledge are used, stored, and shared.

The **Place-Based Education and Homeland History** session focused on reconnecting education to land, culture, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Participants discussed the significance of food sovereignty, particularly the cultural importance of acorns to California Native peoples, as an entry point for understanding relational land stewardship. The group emphasized rejecting settler-colonial land management frameworks and integrating Native American Studies across disciplines. Making campuses more accessible and welcoming for Native students—through housing, food access, and long-term partnerships with Native communities—was identified as a priority.

The **Supporting Native Students on Campus** group addressed challenges related to visibility, institutional communication, and burnout among Native faculty and staff. Participants stressed the need for better communication with university leadership, intentional inclusion of Native staff and students in campus events, and regular convenings of Native faculty and staff to share strategies and reduce isolation. Visibility of Native presence on campus and sustained leadership support were identified as essential for improving retention and student well-being.

Finally, the **Co-Stewardship of UC Lands** session examined how the university can meaningfully address its land-grant history. Participants emphasized that co-stewardship must involve shared authority, long-term investment, and place-specific agreements shaped by Tribal priorities. Successful co-stewardship was defined not by institutional metrics, but by outcomes identified by Tribes, including restored cultural practices and decision-making power.

Specific recommendations from the entire symposium are provided in the earlier section.

Overall, the symposium underscored a shared call for the University of California to commit to accountability, sustained investment, and relationship-based approaches that honor Tribal sovereignty. Participants emphasized that meaningful progress requires policy reform, leadership engagement, and a willingness to redistribute power in order to move forward in a good way.

Survey Results and Attendee Recommendations for UC Accountability and Future Action from Symposium Attendees

Attendees

A total of 179 participants took part in the UC Land-Grab Symposium, with 142 attending in person and 37 attending virtually. Attendees represented a broad range of campuses, colleges, and community organizations, including:

- Cosumnes River College
- CSU Humboldt
- CSU Sacramento
- UC Agriculture and Natural Resources
- UC Berkeley
- UC Cooperative Extension
- UC Davis
- UC Davis Natural Reserve System
- UC Merced
- UC San Diego
- UC Santa Cruz
- UC Office of the President
- Various community organizations

Participants also represented a diversity of roles within their institutions and communities, including:

- Community Members
- Faculty
- Graduate Students
- Postdoctoral Scholars
- Staff
- Tribal Members
- Undergraduate Students

Survey

Following the symposium, attendees were invited to complete a survey. Nineteen (19) participants responded, with 17 in-person attendees and 2 virtual participants. Three respondents identified their Tribal affiliation. Survey respondents represented the following institutions: UC Davis (8), CSU Sacramento (1), UC Berkeley (2), Cosumnes River College (1), UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (1), UC Santa Cruz (1), UC San Francisco (1), and UC Merced (1).

Highlights from the Survey

I. Engaging and Impactful Format
   - Most attendees rated the event highly (4 or 5 out of 5) for engagement and overall quality.
   - Respondents appreciated the opportunity for community connection and dialogue.

II. Powerful Speakers and Sessions
   - Participants felt the speakers were impactful.
   - Breakout sessions were praised for their depth and relevance.

III. New Awareness and Learning
   - Many participants reported that the material was new and enlightening, especially around:
     - The historical context of land-grant abuses.
     - Data sovereignty and Tribal research partnerships.
     - The gap between ideal and current practices in co-stewardship.

IV. Community Building and Advocacy
   - Attendees valued the networking opportunities and the chance to connect with others working on Indigenous justice.
   - Several participants expressed a renewed commitment to advocacy and institutional accountability.

Recommendations for UC Accountability and Future Action from Attendees

I. Institutional Support and Funding

   - Create a Native American fund (1–5% of UC earnings) for programs designed by Tribal communities.
   - Provide free tuition and housing for Native students serving as land stewards.
   - Offer extended educational opportunities for Native students who pause their studies.

II. Land and Resource Access

   - Implement land return or co-stewardship agreements with Tribes.

- Allow Tribes to harvest Indigenous plants and access UC lands for cultural practices.
- Include Tribal traditions in academic calendars and campus life.

III. Curriculum and Representation

- Require Native American Studies courses for all majors.
- Develop Homeland History classes for undergrad and graduate students.
- Increase Tribal representation in faculty, staff, and symposium planning.

IV. Engagement and Reciprocity

- Move beyond land acknowledgments to reciprocal relationships with Tribal communities.
- Host future events at Tribal sites, co-facilitated by Native groups.
- Pay Native research participants and ensure Tribal voices are central to discussions.

V. Research and Collaboration

- Launch joint research initiatives with Tribes on climate, agriculture, and socio-cultural topics.
- Support data sovereignty and Tribal control over research outcomes.
- Encourage student involvement in Tribal-led projects and community-based learning.

Attendee Comments

- I am particularly interested in how land-grab university endowments invested in the stock market are continuing to dispossess Native Nations and Indigenous territories throughout the Americas…. Faculty out of University of Iowa with Friends of the Earth started a TIAA divestment (TIAA being the retirement fund for most university employees outside of CA) campaign focused on investments in palm oil plantations, which have overtaken cattle & soy as the #1 threat to Indigenous lands in Latin America: https://tiaa-divest.org/. Countless Indigenous environmental defenders have been murdered (not just due to palm oil, but also oil, gas, and mining projects): https://www.landcoalition.org/en/latest/report-unveils-escalating-violence-against-land-defenders/ Or see Global Witness: https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/missing-voices/

- Given that we can expect that these land grabs will escalate further under the neo-Monroe Doctrinism of the current administration, how can we layer in this human rights analysis and tracking of how university endowments are invested? I've been following the Wokini Initiative out of South Dakota State University. They had already been doing this work before the Land-Grab University series (LGU) came out. As a doctoral student, I'm curious whether there is a collective of LGU's interested in disrupting settler colonialism (or at least 'reckon' with their founding through Indigenous land dispossession) and changing to work with Tribal nations and support Native students,

faculty, and staff on their campuses. If so, is it at the President/Chancellor level? Faculty/staff level for collective/collaboration?

- There's a dissonance between the one-size-fits-all land acknowledgment and the need to operationalize it to so many different groups of people.
- Our table had UC Davis Native medical students and former board members from the Native American Health Center in Sacramento. UC Davis uses the Native American Health Center (NAHC) for training but charges the Native American Health Center, so they were forced to end the relationship. Tribal centers offer their time and resources to host students. They also offer Native medical students the opportunity to work in Native clinics. It's not a one-size-fits-all. UC Davis should not treat NAHC the same as a Kaiser hospital.
- Two barriers are the university not recognizing the difference between equity and equality, and the university's inability to acknowledge the differences between working with sovereign nations and ethnic groups. We need to move beyond land acknowledgment to reciprocal relationships.

Suggested Resources

Overview of "Land-Grab" Universities

- **Lee, R., & Ahtone, T. (2020).** "Land-Grab Universities: Expropriated Indigenous land is the foundation of the land-grant university system." *High Country News*. https://www.landgrabu.org/
- **Ahtone, T., & Lee, R. (2023).** "Misplaced Trust: How states profit from Indigenous land inside reservations." *Grist*.
- https://grist.org/land-grant-universities-stolen-indigenous-land
    - These two investigations form the core empirical foundation for contemporary discussions of land-grant accountability. The *Land-Grab Universities* project includes an interactive database documenting nearly 11 million acres of Indigenous land expropriated to fund 52 institutions. https://www.landgrabu.org/
- **Lee, R., & Ahtone, T. (Forthcoming).** *Land-Grab Universities: How the Morrill Act Dispossessed Native Peoples to Fund American Higher Education.* Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt.
- **Wheatley, K. (2023). "**Benchmarking Land-grant University Institutional Practices"

UC Land Grab

- **University of California. (2020).** *The UC Land Grab: A Legacy of Profit from Indigenous Land.*
    - Report
    - Event recordings.
- **Fanshel, R. Z. (2021).** "The Land in Land-grant: Unearthing Indigenous Dispossession in the Founding of the University of California." *UC Berkeley: Center for Research on Native American Issues*. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7kx7k25f

Student Support

- **Shotton, H. J., Lowe, S. C., & Waterman, S. J. (Eds.). (2013).** *Beyond the Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education.* Stylus Publishing.

Research

- **Carroll, S, et al. (2020). "**The CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance." *Data Science Journal*, 19:43.
- **Halmai, N. B., Taitingfong, R., Jennings, L. L., Yracheta, J., Garba, I., Lund, J. R., ... & Carroll, S. R. (2025). "**Indigenous data sovereignty in genomics and human genetics: genomic equity and justice for Indigenous peoples." *Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics*, *26*.

- **Smith, L. T. (2021).** *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* Zed Books.

Place-Based Education and Homeland History

- **Baldy, C. R., Reed, K. P., & Begay, K. (2023).** "Polytech to PolyTEK: Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Science, and the Future Forward Polytechnic University." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, *45*, 34–51. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48725118

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Land Stewardship

- **Kimmerer, R. W. (2002).** "Weaving traditional ecological knowledge into biological education: A call to action." *BioScience*, 52(5), 432-438.
    - Addresses Indigenous knowledge integration and institutional responsibility.
- **Kimmerer, R. W. (2013).** *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants.* Milkweed Editions.

California

- **Madley, B. (2016).** *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873.* Yale University Press.
- **Rawls, J. J. (1984).** *Indians of California: The Changing Image.* University of Oklahoma Press.
- **Lindsay, B. C. (2012).** *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873.* University of Nebraska Press.

Additional scholarly books and articles

- **Grande, S. (2018).** "Refusing the university." In E. Tuck & K. W. Yang (Eds.), *Toward What Justice? Describing Diverse Dreams of Justice in Education* (pp. 47-65). Routledge.
- **Moraza-Keeswood, N. and Biestman, K. (2020).** Integrating Indigenous Peacemaking in the Academy: A Peacemaking Toolkit. Stanford Digital Repository. Available at: https://purl.stanford.edu/jw138jz6718
- **Stein, S. (2022).** *Unsettling the University: Confronting the Colonial Foundations of US Higher Education.* Johns Hopkins University Press.
- **Stewart-Ambo, T**. "The Future Is in the Past: How Land-Grab Universities Can Shape the Future of Higher Education." *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* [NAIS], vol. 8, no. 1, spring 2021, pp. 162+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A654001831/AONE?u=anon~f914c7f7&sid=googleScholar&xid=a5ca9de1. Accessed 12 Feb. 2026.

- **Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012).** "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.
    - Foundational theoretical framework for understanding land dispossession and settler colonialism in education.
- **Wilder, C. S. (2013).** *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities.* Bloomsbury Press.
    - While focused on slavery, Wilder's methodology of institutional accountability has influenced land-grant scholarship.